

WANDERERS GO THIRD WITH A FLUKE GOAL!

FORCED to field a rearranged team due to injury and unavailability at Topfield on Tuesday night, Wycombe Wanderers did well to clinch all three Rothmans Isthmian League points to push themselves into the top three. But it took a lucky goal by Mick Holifield to finally decide the issue.

Wycombe's slice of fortune came in the 72nd minute. Tony Horseman played the ball across the edge of the penalty area to Holifield, who swung his foot at the ball. The shot ballooned high in the air and sailed over the surprised goalkeeper into the net. In a way it was similar to Hitchin's winner in the corresponding game last year. They had the luck on that occasion — this time it was Wycombe's turn.

Considering all the changes in the Blues team and also the difficult conditions of a rain soaked ground, Wanderers deserved their victory. But they were made to fight all the way by the home side who never stopped running and could have given Wycombe a far greater testing.

Had their passing and teamwork been of a higher standard, the verdict might easily have gone the other way.

The Wycombe team had a most unfamiliar look about it. Keith Mead was unavailable to business commitments. Dave Bullock was the obvious replacement but he was injured in a car accident the previous evening and was still in hospital when the match was played.

By STUART EARP Hitchin Town 0, Wycombe Wanderers 1

Dave has cut his head badly but should be leaving Wycombe General soon. Another player suffering with injury is Gary Hand, who had six stitches inserted in a wound sustained against Slough on Saturday.

TIME TO SETTLE

This meant Terry Reardon was drafted into the back four with Paul Birdseye moving to left back and Paul Griffiths coming in at right back. Mick Holifield returned to the team in midfield, alongside Dave Alexander and Howard Kennedy.

Obviously these changes meant the team needed time to settle. But thanks to two excellent performances by Reardon and Birdseye, they did just enough to hold onto the points.

After a shaky start, Alexander was the first to test keeper Doug Parkin with a low drive but Hitchin were quick to retaliate.

Using the aerial power of 20 goal Howard Kettleborough, they were always on the lookout for any knockdowns from the tall centre forward.

The standard of passing from both sides, however, was badly affected by the greasy surface and much of the play in the first

half was riddled with errors. The first 10 minutes of the second period produced some of the best football of the match.

Only two minutes had elapsed when Steve Perrin drove in a shot which Parkin had to tip around the post and from Horseman's corner, Alan Phillips stole up unmarked to send a looping header onto the crossbar — the closest effort yet.

Now it was Hitchin's turn. In the 51st minute Kettleborough pivoted perfectly to send in a great shot on the turn but John Maskell managed to push it around the post for a corner. The resulting flag kick curled menacingly into the box where Kettleborough headed firmly towards the corner of the net. But Maskell again saved the day, by parrying the ball and giving Birdseye the chance to clear for another corner.

After that hectic action, the game returned to the standard of the first half with Wanderers still finding trouble in combining

consistently. These wet pitches certainly don't suit Wycombe. Their skilful, first time football based on passing accuracy is far more conducive to firm grounds and it seems they will always find it harder going in the muddy conditions.

It was during a quiet spell in

the second half that Wanderers snatched what was to prove the winning goal. Hitchin took a long time to recover from the shock and except for one close shave, Wanderers finished the game in the driving seat. That one incident, however, could so easily have cost the visitors a couple of points.

Phillips, who was not at his best throughout the game, decided to bring the ball down to his feet instead of heading clear first time. Kettleborough intercepted and slipped the ball through to Giggle, unmarked on the left side. With his pace, Giggle looked to have a great chance of scoring. But he failed to control the ball and in wasting a couple of precious seconds, allowed Phillips to atone for his mistake by rushing back to block the shot. That wasn't the end of the danger, though. The ball was then crossed back into the box where Kettleborough tried to set up a chance instead of heading for goal. Somehow, Wanderers eventually managed

to clear the ball away after a hectic scramble.

Kennedy and Perrin both went close at the other end before the final whistle. Perrin beating former Wycombe full back Roger Grant, who looked far from happy against his ex-team mates.

Another former Loakes Park man Tony Brothers worked busily in midfield and Hitchin, although defeated on Tuesday, have the calibre to lift themselves out of the relegation zone with their many games in hand. For Wanderers this was an important victory. If they are to stand any chance of cutting back Enfield's vice-like grip on the Division One leadership, they cannot afford to drop any points from now on.

WYCOMBE: J. Maskell, P. Griffiths, T. Reardon, A. Phillips, P. Birdseye, M. Holifield, H. Kennedy, D. Alexander, A. Horseman (sub. D. Evans 81 mins), K. Searle, S. Perrin.

HITCHIN: D. Parkin, G. Armstrong, M. Howkins, J. Kettleborough, R. Grant, A. Brothers, T. Williams (sub. C. Bonner 77 mins), P. Watson, N. Bunker, H. Kettleborough, P. Giggle.

Referee: D. Smith (Hornchurch).
Half-time: 0-0. **Goalscorer:** Holifield (72).

Official attendance: 540.



MICK HOLIFIELD
... lucky winner